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NOAH'S FLOOD.

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NOAH's FLOOD.

NOAH was a remarkable instance of a righteous man living in the midst of a wicked generation, and in giving his character and history, we are necessarily led into a description of the general state of mankind at the time in question.

Though the world, which is now about six thousand years old, had been created only about one thousand years at the time of Noah's birth, it was probably then very full of inhabitants, for as the life of the same man lasted often for eight or nine hundred years, many generations may be supposed to have flourished together. Adam himself was alive at the same time with Noah's father, and he died only a short time before the birth of Noah, so that our first forefather must have seen a very numerous and (what was extremely distressing) a very depraved posterity. He must have beheld his children's children corrupting one another, and making a rapid progress in iniquity.

As men began to multiply on the face of the earth, they became still more and more abandoned. It pleased God however to preserve a chosen seed in the family of Seth, from whom also the Savior

was to come, of which line of descendants it is said, that "a blessing was in it."

But did this peculiar seed all walk uprightly in the sight of God? Ah! how difficult it is to live unspotted from the world! Even these were infected with the general corruption; and it seems as if the want of separation between the professors of religion, and the open sinners, had hastened the destruction of the earth, for we read that "the sons of God (by which those who seemed to be of the true religion are very naturally supposed by many to have been intended) saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took to them wives of all which they chose." A general carelessness about the religious character of those with whom the professors of religion intermarried, arising from an unrestrained affection for their persons, appears to be given as a reason why matters so soon came to that dreadful pass which we are now to describe them. The few who retained the knowledge of God, probably discovered little zeal, and were scarcely to be distinguished from others, or at least men were strangely drawn aside into worldly compliances.

But while sin was thus advancing with rapid strides, did not God notice, or behold it? Yes; he often made himself known in those days by signs and judgments: "My spirit," he also says, "shall not always strive with man." It appears then that the spirit of God strives even with the most profligate sinners; and in another place, the "patience of God" is represented as "well nigh wearied out in the days of Noah;" yet behold his long-suffering! Still he allows them a respite of an hundred and twenty years, during which period he waits upon them with offers of mercy. He warns them before

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he strikes, and thus proves that he "willeth not the death of a sinner," and that his destruction is of himself.

It is now said, that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Is not this description too strong? Ought not some further evidence of it to be given? My answer is, "God saw it." The men themselves, no doubt, did not see it, and if we could suppose them to have had historians of their own, these, no doubt, would not have mentioned it, but God's testimony is better than that of a thousand witnesses.

Such then being the state of mankind, who can wonder to hear the determination of a holy God to destroy the earth with its inhabitants, and to leave a monument of his awful justice for the warning and instruction of every age that was to follow.

But are none exempted from this general charge of iniquity? Yes, here is an individual selected for our notice. It is said that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The most honorable testimony is given of him in scripture; he is said to have been "a just man, and perfect in his generation," which does not mean that he was without fault, for we read in another place of his being actually overtaken by sin, but that he was a sincere or complete and consistent character, uncorrupted by the wickedness that prevailed in his own time or generation. It is also said in another place that he walked with God, he was mindful of him, accustomed to pray to him, regarding God in all he did: he was also zealous in his cause, for he was "a preacher," as well as an example "of righteous-

ness;" and while the "long-suffering of God" waited on the sinners around him, Noah was raised up for the special purpose of instructing and rebuking them, and warning them of their approaching destruction.

But while we admire his undaunted courage, let us ask ourselves whether we are equally courageous in the same cause, and while we commend Noah for renouncing and reproving the works of darkness, though licensed by general custom, whether we equally renounce and reprove the evils which are now commonly practised. If the fashion of the times will justify us, surely it might have justified Noah also.

But let us next speak of the period of the Deluge, and of the favor shewn to this eminent person. God condescended to reveal to him the tremendous purpose of destroying all flesh by a flood of water, saying unto Noah, "the end of all flesh is before me," yet he enters into covenant with him, to save him and his little family from the general ruin.

The method of deliverance, with all the circumstances of it, were of divine appointment. The Lord himself directed Noah to prepare an ark of immense size, which might contain his household, and a small remnant of all other creatures, for the preservation of their different species. In this building the various animals, with sufficient provision for their support, were to ride in safety, while one common desolation swept away the inhabitants of the earth with all its furniture.

Behold then the faith and obedience of Noah, for which he is mentioned as a bright example to all succeeding ages! An inspired writer has told us that "he believed God." "By faith, Noah being

warned of God of things not seen as yet, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Methinks I see him with stedfast countenance and determined step, proceeding against the profane ridicule of surrounding multitudes, to prepare materials for the ark, and to engage workmen in this strange and arduous employment; while at the same time he reproves that wicked generation, warns them of their danger, and denounces, if they repent not the approaching judgment of God upon them. Instead of respecting his faith, they smile at his credulity, and scornfully turn away from this venerable man of God. Year after year, however, he pursues his work. Year after year, they taunt him with his folly, and amuse themselves in overlooking the vast building as it proceeds.

Surely, say they, he is a man of a gloomy imagination, of an absurd fancy, or of a disturbed brain: he is forward, troublesome, and censorious, always representing our conduct in the most wicked and abominable light; the world, they insist, is not so wicked as he pretends. Fathers and children join in derriding him. High and low, rich and poor, men and maidens, equally forgetful of God, and worldly and unbelieving, comfort each other that they are in the right, and that such a goodly multitude as they seem to make, cannot be altogether wicked, and exposed to one general judgment.

It is here worthy of observation, that the common order of the world does not seem to have been overthrown at the time of which we are speaking, for it is very possible for the frame of society to be held together even when the irreligious and cor-

ruption of man is extremely great. It is true, indeed, we read, "that the earth was filled with violence," for when the passions of men are not restrained by religion, much violence both in their language and conduct is apt to follow of course. One great feature in their characters appears however to be their being quite swallowed up by the pleasures and concerns of this life, for the scripture speaks of them at that time, as eating and drinking, and marrying and being given to marriage, evidently implying, that their whole time and thoughts were engaged in those things, and that by the means of these they were led to forget God, and to neglect the warnings which were sent unto them.

Let us next view Noah entering into the ark, according to the commandment which God had given him: "He, and his sons, and his sons' wives, because of the waters of the flood; of beasts also, and of fowls, and of creeping things, there went in two and two, male and female, as God commanded Noah. And it came to pass, that after seven days that the waters of the flood were upon the earth, and all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened."

But while we accompany Noah into the ark, let us turn our eyes to the multitudes who remained without, of whom no doubt he took his leave, with many painful sensations.

What a wonderful and tremendous scene! Oh! the lamentations and bitter cries of thousands now perishing by that very calamity, the kind notices of which they had refused to attend to, or had presumptuously derided. Many of Noah's dear relations were included in this number. What anguish must he have felt for them; but in vain! they had

despised his warning, their day of grace was past, and he could afford them no relief.

And now the rain overflows the meadows, and the whole multitude seek, no doubt, the rising ground; but the waters increase upon them. A few probably reach the mountains, and they trust that, at least, the highest rocks on the mountain-tops shall save them: "But the waters prevail exceedingly, and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upwards did the waters prevail, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth, and every man, and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark."

It is no unimportant remark, that the truth of this story of which we have thus given the plain scriptural account, is confirmed by a variety of striking circumstances, not necessary here to be mentioned, and also of the several traditions of various and distant nations, differing indeed in their religion, but agreeing in their account of an ancient and general deluge.

And should we not feel terror for ourselves, while we contemplate these effects of the divine vengeance? Who can stand before this holy Lord God! We see here that the God who threatens will also execute his threatenings, and that though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.

But a pleasing prospect opens itself to righteous Noah, "for God remembered Noah, and every living thing with him in the ark, and made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters were assuaged,

and the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, and in the tenth month, the first day of the month were the tops of the mountains seen." Noah now sends forth a raven, and afterwards a dove from the window of the ark, "the dove, as yet could find no rest for the sole of her foot and returned into the ark;" and again "after other seven days he sends forth the dove" again. "And the dove came into him in the evening, and lo in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off, so that Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth." What a pleasing confidence would he now feel of his deliverance; Wherever indeed he turned his eye he would see the devastation which sin had made, nor can he be supposed to have reflected without unutterable anguish on the multitudes that had perished in their iniquities, yet a sense of gratitude for his own wonderful escape seems to have overpowered him, and to have swallowed up for the time every other concern. He begins the new duties of the life which had been preserved to him by an act of solemn worship to his preserver.

"Noah builded an alter unto the Lord and took of every clean beast and offered burnt offerings on the altar."

Sacrifices no doubt had been originally appointed by God for the sake of shewing forth that great atonement which in due time was to be made through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, "that lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world," by whose blood, and not by the blood of bulls and goats, the iniquities of men were to be pardoned and the true worshippers were to be brought nigh to God.

the Lord said, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, neither will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease."

"And God said, I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, that when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

Thus were the tokens of God's mercy given immediately after He had been displaying his most awful vengeance, and if we are walking in the steps of Noah, we may look on the rainbow, even to this day, with confidence and joy, because it is a sign of security not from a flood of waters only, but from all the effects of the wrath of God. It is spoken of in the book of Revelations as the peculiar emblem which surrounds our Savior, for when he is described as "sitting on his throne," it is said, "there was a rainbow round about the throne," implying that as God was true to his promise made to Noah, both delivering him from a flood of waters and no more drowning the world for the sins of men; so also would he be true to the everlasting covenant made through Jesus Christ, who is indeed the Savior as he is promised in the Scriptures of those who put their trust in him.

And it is said in like manner in Isaiah, for the comfort of each individual who shall be found among

God's faithful people, "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of thy peace be removed saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

I think we may reduce the whole instruction to be gained from this awful and affecting story to these two heads, I mean we may learn the "severity" of God on the one hand, and his "goodness" on the other.

Men are not apt to believe that God will be true to his word, especially in respect to his threatenings against the wicked. They chuse to conceive of Him, as some easy being who, because he is merciful will either not punish at all, or will not punish severely, or at least will not extend his punishment to any great number of his creatures, and when the preachers of righteousness stand up like Noah, and declare in the very words of scripture his eternal judgments on the wicked, multitudes are apt to think they will never come to pass, and they treat the preachers much as this wicked and unbelieving world treated Noah before them. But the history which has now been given shews that God is not the sort of being he is supposed to be, and affords a full answer to this dangerous delusion. "For if God spared not the old world but saved Noah the eighth person a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly, and burneth the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them

with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly: The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

Such is the argument drawn by the apostle Peter from these ancient judgments, and it is very remarkable that our Savior himself makes nearly the same use, though in a still stronger way, of these well known and famous events, explaining by the means of them the surprise and consternation which will overtake not the few profligate and more abandoned only, but the worldly-minded and careless, and unbelieving, in the day of judgment: and how important as well as truly charitable is it frequently to warn men of these sayings of that Savior, whose name we all profess to reverence, and in the truth of whose words how shall we refuse to trust? For are not many persons even living at their ease up to the hour of their death, who are by no means religious and yet are no more afraid that a day of wrath is coming, than the world of unbelievers were on the day before the flood. Hear then, I say, our Savior's description of the surprise which will one day overtake such persons.

"As were the days of Noah, so also," says Christ, "shall the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Likewise, also as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. But the same day

that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

B[illegible]n the other hand, let the humble and fearful Christian learn from another part of the same story to trust in the almighty grace and goodness: for as the threatenings of God are sure to the wicked, so also are his promises sure to them that unfeignedly repent and believe in Jesus Christ. They shall be safe amidst all dangers. When "that great and terrible day of the Lord" shall come, in which "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth with all the works thereof shall be burnt up," they having committed their souls into the hands of Christ, having believed his testimony and walked, though in the midst of an evil generation, according to his holy word, shall then be like Noah in the ark, safe, amidst the surrounding storm. And it may be added, that even in this world, when the times grow dark and threatening, and calamity, either public or private, seems to break in upon them like a flood, when the tempest lowers and the clouds seem to gather over all the surrounding countries—even then, I say, God's promises of mercy shall be seen by them shining like the rainbow over the cloud; for amidst all their troubles and afflictions they shall be reminded of their interest in the Savior and in the everlasting covenant of their God.

FINIS.